

Real's RvN bid stalled

Football

AFP, London

Real Madrid's prospective capture of Manchester United striker Ruud van Nistelrooy has stalled after United boss Alex Ferguson rejected their offer, Press Association reported on Wednesday.

It seems only a matter of time before a deal goes through, although Real will clearly have to get much nearer United's 15 million-pound (21.9 million-euro) valuation for the player than the 10 million pounds it is believed they have bid.

Intense rumours out of Spain on Tuesday night suggested van Nistelrooy was due in the capital for a medical on Wednesday before completing a big-money move to the Bernabeu.

It appears the Real website even published a profile of the 30-year-old earlier in the day, only to swiftly take it

off, claiming it was a technical problem.

However Ferguson said: "There is no agreement with Real Madrid and Manchester United over Ruud. We have refused their offer. He remains a Manchester United player."

Ferguson added, while in South Africa for a friendly against Kaizer Chiefs on Tuesday night: "The situation is this: the player has said he wants to leave. The chief executive of the club, David Gill, is looking into the matter."

"Bayern Munich and Real Madrid have both shown interest in him."

The 30-year-old van Nistelrooy lost his place in the first team at the end of last season and did not appear for Holland in their World Cup second round loss to Portugal.

However he has scored 95 goals in 150 Premier League matches for Manchester United, whom he joined in 2001 from PSV Eindhoven.

With van Nistelrooy's short-term future still undecided and interest in

Atletico Madrid's Fernando Torres stalling, Ferguson may yet stick with his current strikeforce.

His midfield is another matter though, as public confirmation of his interest in Michael Carrick emphasises.

"We are trying to sign another central midfielder," said Ferguson. "We have made a bid for Michael Carrick but they (Tottenham) turned it down."

Ferguson did not elaborate on the Carrick issue but he did hint at a possible bid for Patrick Vieira should he receive confirmation the former Arsenal man wishes to leave scandal-hit Juventus, who are now bound for the depths of Serie B.

"We have to see what Juventus are planning for their players," said Ferguson. "Vieira, (Fabio) Cannavaro and (Gianluca) Buffon are all top players and there are question marks about where they are going next season."

Pekerman confirms resignation

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Jose Pekerman has confirmed he will not carry on in the job, the football association's president said in a newspaper interview on Wednesday.

"Pekerman has told me he's not going to continue with the national team," Julio Grondona, president of the Argentina Football Association (AFA), told the sports daily Ole.

Pekerman first announced his decision immediately after his team lost on penalties to hosts Germany in the quarter-finals of the World Cup following a 1-1 draw.

Grondona would not comment on possible successors.

"We'll wait and see. We haven't thought about this because it (the World Cup) is still very recent," he said.

Ole named 10 possible successors, ranging from Diego Maradona to veteran Carlos Bilardo, who led Argentina to the title in 1986 and second place four years later.

Former taxi driver Pekerman, who won three World Youth championships, took over the senior side in October 2004 after the shock resignation of Marcelo Bielsa.

He had a reputation for fair play and making his sides play attacking football yet was blamed for being too cautious during Argentina's match in Germany.

With Argentina leading 1-0 and in control of the match, he pulled off playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme and brought on holding player Esteban Cambiasso and also left speedy forward Lionel Messi on the bench.

Germany hit back to equalise and confirmed their penalty shoot-out expertise by converting all of their attempts.

Drunken Baros runs amok

AFP, Prague

Czech Republic striker Milan Baros went on a drunken rampage during his post-World Cup vacation, according to Czech newspaper reports on Wednesday.

Aston Villa star Baros, 24, had been given extra time off by his English Premiership club after playing for his country at the World Cup.

He was reported to have spent several days during his break on a drinking spree and one newspaper, Blesk, said he was seen dancing bare-chested in a nightclub with a condom tied in his hair.

Photos of Baros's exploits had appeared in the local press and it was also claimed he was involved in a brawl during wedding celebrations in a trendy nightclub.

Dnes newspaper criticised the former Liverpool player, who was the leading scorer at Euro 2004, for risking "his name, his career and his talent."

Former Czech international Radek Drulak, a Euro 96 finalist, warned Baros he was ruining his career and added: "The Premiership begins in just three weeks but he cannot expect to find his form after a one-month long party."

Baros, who was the subject of a recently rejected transfer approach from German club Hamburg, reportedly apologised for his behaviour before leaving for England on Tuesday and said: "I should be setting an example for young sportsmen and it's unfortunate that was not the case."

SLC still in quagmire

AFP, Colombo

Former Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga on Wednesday slammed the sports minister for the delay in naming a committee to oversee the sport in the island nation.

Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapakse had last week, on the request of Ranatunga and other former players, ordered that elections to a deeply divided Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) be cancelled.

Rajapakse had also asked sports minister Jeevan Kumaratunga to name a panel to replace the SLC's interim committee and bring in ex-players like Ranatunga to administer the sport.

The sports minister, however, has put off appointing a new committee and asked the existing panel under Jayantha Dharmadasa to continue for an indefinite period.

Ranatunga, who became a cult figure in the country after leading Sri Lanka to victory in the 1996 World Cup, said the government was going back on its promise to constitute a new committee.

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Real apologise for website blunder

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid have apologised for a blunder that made a profile of Ruud van Nistelrooy appear briefly on their website as if the Manchester United striker had signed for the club.

The Primera Liga side blamed the gaffe to a computer error but it fuelled speculation that the 30-year-old Dutch striker has already agreed to move to Spain.

"The club would like to clarify that Realmadrid.com compile different reports, news stories and profiles of players that might join the club, including one on the Dutchman but they are merely for internal use," Real said in a statement.

"This profile appeared on the club website for a few minutes because of a computer error, but such pieces are normally only published after the official

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RUUD VAN NISTELROOY

Kezman hails Clemente

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Atletico Madrid's Serbia striker Mateja Kezman has hailed his country's decision to appoint former Spain boss Javier Clemente as coach. "He is a great coach with a lot of experience. It is good news for us because we have players with a lot of quality and I think he will be able to help us," Kezman told the Atletico website.

"He has shown he has belief and is a winner."

Clemente, who led Spain to the quarterfinals of the 1994 World Cup

and Euro 96, confirmed on Tuesday he would take charge of the side for their Euro 2008 qualification campaign.

The 56-year-old will travel to Serbia on Thursday to sign the deal and will be presented to the media on Friday.

Serbia & Montenegro played as a unified team at the World Cup in Germany despite Montenegro voting for independence from Serbia in May.

They exited the tournament in the first round after defeats by the Netherlands, Argentina, who thumped them 6-0, and Ivory Coast, forcing manager Ilija Petkovic to

step down.

Serbia will play in the Euro 2008 qualifiers on their own and are in Group A with Portugal, Poland, Belgium, Finland, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

"After the World Cup we are all a little down but now we can start a new era with a new coach with new hopes and ambitions," added Kezman.

"I am sure everyone in Serbia wants a coach like Clemente because he is great figure in the world of football. Everyone knows who he is."

Kezman had a disappointing World Cup, failing to score and being off in the defeat by Argentina.

'No excuses for Zidane'

Football

AFP, Rome

Marco Materazzi said on Tuesday Lilian Thuram should not make excuses for Zinedine Zidane's headbutt after the French defender described Italy's Materazzi as "an illness that should not exist".

France captain Zidane was sent off near the end of extra-time in the World Cup final, which Italy eventually won on penalties, following a 1-1 draw in Berlin on July 9.

Materazzi told ANSA news agency: "Thuram would have done better to point out that it was not the first time that Zidane has made certain errors, rather than make excuses for him at any price," presumably referring to the 12 red cards Zidane has received during his career.

Thuram had told Tuesday's edition of Les Inrockuptibles weekly publication that "a player like Materazzi is an illness which should not exist."

"Materazzi has given a negative image of football and he does not need this type of attitude because he is really a very good player. Football is a game where the rules need to be observed."

"What's the point of winning if you have cheated? It means nothing."

Thuram did however add that Zidane's headbutt into the chest of Materazzi was unfortunate.

Materazzi, known for his rugged play, added: "In the past, I have also been the first to make errors and there's no point defending someone just for the

principle."

Zidane has since explained the incident by saying Materazzi insulted his mother and sister. The Italian however denied he insulted Zidane's mother.

The disciplinary commission of the sport's world governing body FIFA has opened an inquiry into the incident with the French captain being heard on July 20 in Zurich.



MARCO MATERAZZI

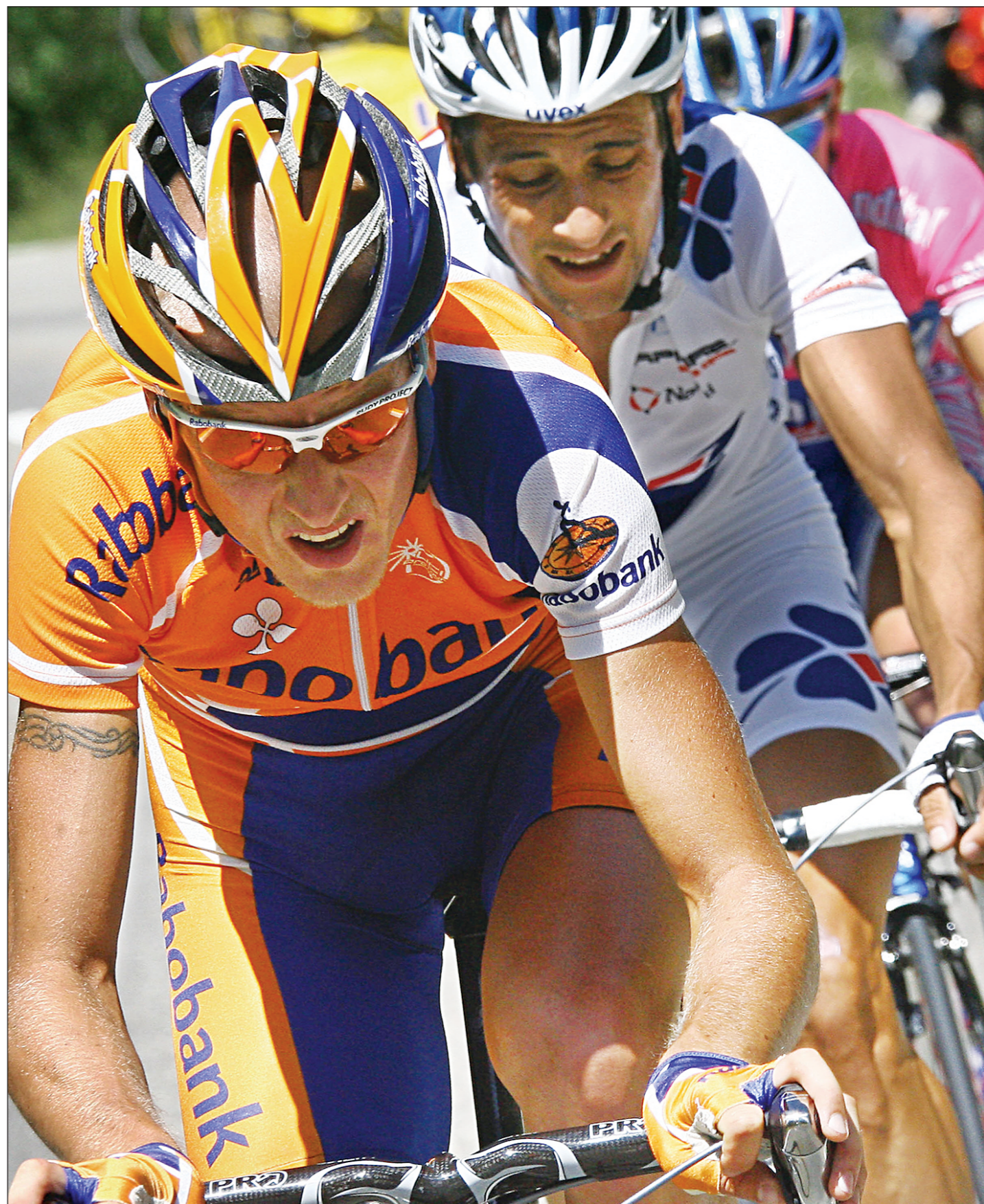


PHOTO: AFP

Danish rider Michael Rasmussen (L) leads in front of Frenchman Sandy Casar (R) during their breakaway in the 182km 16th stage of the 93rd Tour de France from Bourg d'Oisans to La Toussuire on Wednesday.

Rasmussen wins 16th stage Landis loses yellow jersey

Cycling

REUTERS, La Toussuire

Michael Rasmussen of Denmark mastered some of the highest passes in the Alps, including the Col du Galibier, to win the 182-km 16th stage of the Tour de France on Wednesday.

Spaniard Oscar Pereiro of the Caisse d'Epargne team claimed the yellow jersey from American Floyd Landis (Phonak), who cracked on the last climb to La Toussuire ski resort.

After an astounding 173-km ride in the lead and more than five hours in the saddle on a stifling hot day, Rasmussen crossed the line one minute 41 seconds ahead of Spaniard Carlos Sastre (CSC).

Pereiro was third, 1:54 adrift and two seconds ahead of Australian Cadel Evans (Davitamon) and German Andreas Klöden (T-Mobile).

Rasmussen, who was crowned King of the Mountains last year, claimed the polka-dot jersey from Spain's David de la Fuente.

Italian Daniele Bennati (Lampre), third in the best sprinter's standings pulled out 98 km from the finish, leaving Spaniard Oscar Freire (Rabobank) the only real rival to Australia's green jersey holder Robbie McEwen (Davitamon).

Rasmussen escaped nine kilometres into the stage with Sandy

Mikel granted UK work permit

AFP, London

Nigerian midfielder Jon Obi Mikel, a 16 million-pound (23.4 million-euro) Chelsea signing from Norwegian club Lynn Oslo, has been granted a work permit.

The Premiership champions completed the move of the 19-year-old last month after a dispute with Lynn and Manchester United.

Mikel is one of four players to have moved to Stamford Bridge this summer along with Michael Ballack, Andriy Shevchenko and Salomon Kalou.

Casar of France and Slovenia's Tadej Valjavec.

They rode uphill from the start in Le Bourg d'Oisans to the hors category Galibier.

Rasmussen charged to the summit at 2,645 metres, taking the 5,000 euros (6,248 dollars) prize as winner of the "Henri Desgranges souvenir", a special award given to the first rider over the race's highest point in honour of the founder of the race.

The main bunch led by yellow jersey holder Landis, who started the day with a 10-second lead over Pereiro, was 4:40 adrift.

Frenchman Sylvain Chavanel crashed spectacularly in the descent, slamming into a concrete barrier on a tight bend. After receiving medical treatment, the Cofidis rider resumed the race on a spare bike.

Casar, who finished sixth in the Giro d'Italia, and Valjavec cracked on the next pass, the Croix de Fer.

At the top of the Col du Mollard, Rasmussen crossed the line 7:20 ahead of the peloton and the last climb to La Toussuire, barely diminished his lead while the battle for the yellow jersey was taking place a few bends behind him.

Calciopoli appeal date set

Football

REUTERS, Rome

The four top Italian soccer clubs found guilty in the Serie A match-fixing scandal will begin their appeals on July 22, the president of the appeals court has said.

"The appeals process, following the sentences of the sports tribunal, will start on Saturday morning (0700 GMT)," Piero Sandulli told Italian state broadcaster RAI on Tuesday.

Last Friday a sports tribunal ordered Juventus, Fiorentina and Lazio to start next season in Italy's second-tier Serie B with points deducted after finding them guilty of conspiring with referees and linesmen to rig matches in the 2004/05 season.

The fourth side, AC Milan, escaped relegation, but were thrown out of European competition and ordered to start their next campaign minus 15 points. All four have announced their intention to appeal.

Sandulli defended the work of the sports tribunal, which prohibited witnesses and video evidence,

Woods, Faldo feud on

INTERNET, undated

British bookmakers were up to their tricks Tuesday by offering some unusual side bets for the British Open.

None was more tantalising than defending champion Tiger Woods and three-time champion Nick Faldo playing in the same group.

William Hill is offering 6-to-4 odds that they will not shake hands on the first tee Thursday, and 25-to-1 odds that Woods and Faldo will come to blows at some point during the first round. Those odds started at 100-to-1.

Is it all overblown?

Woods and Faldo were never close, and have only played together twice in competition: the first round of the 1997 Masters, and the first round of the Accenture Match Play Championship, which Woods won handily.

But there has been much focus on Faldo criticizing Woods swing while working for ABC Sports at the 2005 Buick Invitational, and Woods made it clear Tuesday that he doesn't expect much social time Thursday or Friday.

"We don't really talk much," he said. "I've only played with him two times since I've been a pro, and there wasn't a lot of talking there, either."

Both are intense while playing, anyway.

Faldo walks quickly and keeps his head down. Woods generally is the model of concentration.

Woods was asked what his reaction would be if Faldo wants to chat.

"Surprised," he said.

Faldo turned 49 on Tuesday, and he was asked again about his criticism of Woods at the Buick Invitational last year. Woods was leading by one shot on the final hole when he fanned a 2-iron that narrowly missed the water, and went on to make birdie. "A complete fan and a miss," Faldo said.

"I was just doing what I was paid to do," Faldo said. "If I compliment him, nobody says anything, do they?" Faldo also said he was surprised the Royal & Ancient would put him in the same group with the defending champion, especially because they are 19 years apart in age and a generation apart in golf.

"I'm surprised he wasn't placed in a younger age group," he said.